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## **Self-representation as a performative act of the body: absence-presence disruptions and aporias in the works of Helena Almeida and Jorge Molder**

### **Abstract**

This text analyses the series “Voar” (2001) by Helena Almeida and “Anatomy and Boxing” (1996) by Jorge Molder. Their practice mainly uses the language of photography, although it also contains a conceptual discussion on performance, as the living body of the artist is an ongoing presence actively participating in the artistic process.

In this process, photography is not a recording of a situation but the place of an event – a place of embodiment, performativity, representation, and also identity –, in which the body is seen as a function of an absent presence. It constitutes the site of the artistic experience and not simply its object, representing the continuity between the image and its referent, by the transforming of the performative self-presence into the iconic self-absence of the body in the works.

Exploring their creative process enables understanding the links between the ephemerality of the staged performance and the endless fictional possibilities of the photographic subject matter.

**Keywords:** self-representation; embodiment; performance; photography; absence-presence relationship

### **Introduction**

This text discusses and reflects on self-representation as a performative act of the body by examining how it is used in the works of two Portuguese artists – Helena Almeida and Jorge Molder, finding the underlying logic in their creative processes.<sup>1</sup>

Even though they mainly work through the language of photography, there is also a conceptual discussion on performance, as the living body of the artist is an ongoing presence

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<sup>1</sup> The text presented here is from my PhD research project, which was fully sponsored by FCT (grant SFRH / BD / 43455 / 2008). Although not fully presented here, the results of this research form the basis of my article. I am most grateful to the editor, Gustavo Vicente, for the invitation to participate in this project, as well as for the opportunity to share my ideas in the “Corpo Presente” discussion on May 12 2014. It has been a pleasure to collaborate with this group of authors. I also thank specially to Helena Almeida for the courtesy of allowing to reproduce the images here included.

actively participating in the artistic process. It is therefore necessary to identify the specificity of the performance that finds its logic in photographic expression, one that is not connected to the understanding of a live action, but that leads to the use of the body as a constitutive part of the work.

The relationship between performance and photography is a guideline for the analysis, bringing together image-making, iconography, mediation processes and academic inquiry. They are substantiated by the connections linking embodiment, identity, immediacy spaces,<sup>2</sup> expression and aesthetics, ranging from the presence of the body emanating from all its performative acts, to its symbolic absence or representation in the works. In this context, photography is not a registering tool, it is rather the place for the performative experience of the body and a fundamental piece in the creative process, forming part of the work's conceptualization.

The final work is the result of an event, design as a space of performativity, representation, and embodiment, besides the construction of identity. This article will focus on the series *Voar (Flying)* (2001), by Helena Almeida (see figures 1 to 8), and *Anatomy and Boxing* (1997) by Jorge Molder (see *Anatomy and Boxing Exhibition Catalogue* [1997c], held in Centro Português de Fotografia, Porto, from December 1997 to February 1998) built as performative universes in which self-representation is understood not just as figuration or portrait, but as staged events externalising the singularity of the artist in a specific situation.

Self-representation is thus considered a socially contextualized discursive and performative act of the body seen as the function of an absent presence. It represents the continuity between the image and its referent, by changing the performative self-presence into the iconic self-absence of the body in the works. Thus, this study is not reduced to the

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<sup>2</sup> Signifying the space-time dimension of the performative acts of the body, that is, the social relations of production, and disclosure, interaction and acceptance conditions structuring the works. More accurately, immediacy spaces are the relational, discursive and symbolic contexts of artistic practices. Including power, influence and legitimacy issues as the way images' discourses circulate, are established, or are eventually challenged by the public. The same contexts cross curricular paths merging and integrating the structure of the habitus of these artists. This category - immediacy spaces - is used by analogy with the notion of "mediations" in the art field. These are usually applied to all the tools, networks, and relationships enabling or constraining any activity, agency, reflexivity, power, or significance of art works, to which new technologies are particularly important for their role in contemporary society through the specificity of the connections they produce (cf. Conde, 2011:31). The immediacy spaces thus represent a category used in reference to that notion, but that aims to emphasize above all, the permanently embedded and culturally mediated condition of the individual dispositions (*habitus*) and of the agents or artists' actions, in which they participate or find themselves directly involved when developing their practices, assuming the use of multiple languages and knowledge in the development of such relationships, always (mediated) by the immediacy of the(ir) body in the world.

forms of self-representation and their technical elements. It includes the understanding of images as the result of a process involving the artist's embodied agency, *habitus* and practices, all directly presupposed in the relationship between body and representation; in addition to the understanding of their meanings depending on their exhibition, circulation, mediation and perception.

My study begins by demonstrating how, for Helena Almeida and Jorge Molder, the body is the proper site for artistic experience through its constant presence in their work, proving the embodied character of such practices. I shall then move on to show how the body is also a singular project, a medium and a tool in this creative process, indicating how artists use it (through the represented image) as a place of affirmation as well as identity. It supports the performative and photographic experience, besides showing its function minimizing the effects of possible abstraction in the works. Lastly, it reveals its vital importance by connecting the scene of performative interaction and the final product in the photographic form, establishing the images' potential to exercise power, namely through their agency, as works of art.

The methodology is based on different visual perspectives: the analysis of the works' actual visual discourse: its message, content and visual appearance; the perspective on the artists' production in terms of why, when, who they are for and how they are seen. There is also viewer's perspective, for whom the first significant opportunity to relate to and reflect on these works is aesthetic, but who only communicates with the works in the mediated contexts of interpretation and perception, and the works' relationship with other texts and images (cf. Rose, 2007: 11-14).

The series are built as performative universes as artists continually rehearse and reorganise performative acts of the body according to the photographic concept they have imagined. In this process, the absence-presence binomial becomes significant, suggesting the power of the images is beyond the represented universe, as it tests their limits, as well the limits of the body's metamorphoses. The body functions as resource and medium of the artistic process in constructing a particular version of the work of art. It constitutes the site of the artistic experience and not simply its object. To explore the creative process and the visual techniques employed allows understanding of the elements and conditions (origins, interactions, motivations) linking the ephemeral nature of the staged performance with the endless fictional possibilities of the photographic material.

The text will first discuss the relationship between performance, photography, and the body, besides other mediations in the arts, from a sociological perspective. It then addresses the paradox of immediacy, subsequently presenting the reading of Jorge Molder's *Anatomy and Boxing* (1997) and Helena Almeida's *Voar (Flying)* in the light of this perspective.

### **Performance, Photography, Embodiment: a sociological perspective**

The term performance can be extended to artistic practices incorporating different languages associated with artists' bodily actions, such as video or photography. Accordingly, this study does not discuss a type of performance associated with the understanding of a live action, but one that finds its logic in photographic expression, which uses the body as a constitutive part of the work. In this, photography functions as an original imprint of an envisioned event, person, or object: a kind of conceptual extension of a performative action, allowing its disclosure towards an extended public. It ensures the support of a presence transposing the ephemeral, filling the requirements of a momentary and transitory dimension. It represents the possibility of redemption for a body, gesture or interaction, for their transience, as it fixes them in a certain space-time.

The body carries cultural, political, social, and artistic values and beliefs, transforming itself into a powerful medium of communication associated with representation and image signification, while photography is its medium of enunciation. It represents the exercise of performative acts of the body as a space-time of liberty, constituting the expression of an action, the language, the site, and the power of an idea – personal, aesthetic, and symbolic.

The body has become conceptualized in photography in terms of expression and agency. This has assigned it a certain materiality, giving it a non-random sense as the embodied representation has an objective aesthetic function. The images are enactments of gestures and poses according to artists' conceptions, i.e., embodied by a cognitive subject within specific frameworks and systems of interpretation and evaluation existing for the body according to the various social contexts. In this scenario, the body is seen as a socially constructed category. It represents a space-time of embodiment, reproducing canons and disciplines, in public demonstrations of expressive, intentional, voluntary, and highly reflective conceptualizations and uses, resulting from individual determinations socially mobilized (cf. Ferreira, 2006:555).

To think of the body from a sociological perspective and as a historically constructed category is to think of it in terms of culture and language, breaking with the naturalistic way of classifying and treating it. In other words, to conceptualize it not only biologically, based on its scientifically accepted physical and chemical properties, but also through the sociological, ideological, and visual forms of understanding existing in these systems on the body. It means focussing on socially constructed discourses on the body, ranging from standards, symbols, values, and representations to the learned and performed forms of personal presentation and acting, in addition to its forms of pictorial representation.

Despite focussing on socially constructed categories on the body, this discussion is not centered on the possibly expected question of gender categories determining these works, since we are working on a female and a male artist. It rather focuses on the internalized or embodied categories on the body, as ways of seeing it, acting and being, not necessarily linked with gender, but with other determinants, such as biography, training, and life experience. As **Simone de Beauvoir (1973 [1949]: 301)** said, *“One is not born a woman [or man] but becomes one”*. The same happens with becoming a performance artist, or a photographer, etc. So it is not just the case of how Helena Almeida and Jorge Molder act in the works according to their gender roles; that is, according to what people in society expect of them as a woman or man, which has little to do with the biological and physiological nature of the body.<sup>3</sup> What matters for this discussion is the “real” understanding of the body in interaction. The point is to explore the logic of the social construction of these two works by Helena Almeida and Jorge Molder from the perspective of the living principles of their acting; analyzing how the uses of the body in the constructed scenes vary according to different times, spaces and perceptions.

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<sup>3</sup> In fact, it is on the biological body that gender attributes are fixed: socially constructed attributes varying in time and culture, articulated in a way that they are understood as part of each person's nature due to the naturalization of the forms of being man and woman. But on the works of these two artists, the aim is to surpass the socially constructed categories of gender, since they don't define *per se* someone's performativity, agency or actions (assuming all these imply the body). As Peggy Phelan (1993: 151) states: “In employing the body metonymically, performance is capable of resisting the reproduction of metaphor, and- the metaphor I'm most keenly interested in resisting is the metaphor of gender, a metaphor which upholds the vertical hierarchy of value through systematic marking of the positive and the negative. In order to enact this marking, the metaphor of gender presupposes unified bodies which are biologically different. More specifically, these unified bodies are different in 'one' aspect of the body, that is to say, difference is located in the genitals. ... The genitals themselves are forever hidden within metaphor, and metaphor, as a 'cultural worker', continually converts difference into the same. The joined task of metaphor and culture is to reproduce itself; it accomplishes this by turning two (or more) into one. By valuing one gender and marking it (with the phallus) culture reproduces one sex and one gender, the homo-sexual”.

In these works, therefore, the nature of the represented images of the body is also not reduced to the idea of “body-image” in a psychological sense i.e., to the image that the artists project according to the perception of that projection. As it involves more than the existing social representations of the body, it is further related to the apprehension of the actual corporeal interaction in the scene.

The idea is to test a model operating from the living substance of the body as it is *in*, and *through* our bodies that we experience the world, including the way we are introduced and interact with others. A model apprehending the experience of the body in interaction, with its shared and socially established meanings, based on a kind of phenomenological understanding of the world, and that considers the living body the focus of the social practices – a body socially informed by the performative act of self-representation (cf. Bourdieu, 2009). A kind of understanding of the works that links the physical, psychic and the social body, similar to what Peggy Phelan (1993: 167), back in 1993, already suggested about interpreting performance, but adding the sociological dimension to this understanding:

Performance art usually occurs in the suspension between the ‘real’ physical matter of ‘the performing body’ and the psychic experience of what it is to be em-bodied. (...) Performance keeps one anchor on the side of the corporeal (the body Real) and one on the side of the psychic Real. Performance boldly and precariously declares that Being is performed (and made temporarily visible) in the in-between. Performance commentators tend to open their tripods on one side or the other – the ‘physical’ readers are usually trained in movement analysis and/or history, and the ‘psychic’ readers are usually trained in Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalytic theory (although rarely in practice). Perhaps it would be worthwhile to experiment with the possibility of a different notion of the relation between these two camps. It might be fruitful to take the body as always both psychic and material/physical: this would necessitate a combined critical methodology. One could employ both physics and psychoanalysis to read the body’s movements and paralytic pauses.

Performance art is one of the best models to express what we mean by “bodily interactions”. It implicitly connects human behaviour (in a psychological sense) and body movements (in a physical sense), also presupposing the presence of others and the particular scenarios of actuation of the bodies as spaces for sharing identity knowledge and experiences (in a sociological sense). Performativity is a dramatic and contingent construction of meaning observed in the complexity and expansion of the specificity of the bodies in interaction (by

establishing a communicative continuum between them), thus presupposing the body as a bio-psycho-social unit.

Additionally, the sociology of practice allows a broader understanding of the question, one that goes beyond the micro phenomenological and interactionist understanding of self-representation, taking the body as the basis of the social act and, at the same time, allowing the symbolic to be included in the analysis. It considers the internalized principles and models, which are interpreted and reflexively organized by the artists, to be subsequently externalized through the expression and all manifestations of the body in the works. Namely, and from a sociological viewpoint, it involves artists' *habitus*, the structured and structuring principle of every practice, human agency and action that "tends to be grounded in consciousness and expression" including values, knowledge, and manners learned and acquired from the past. In other words, an internalized dispositional system, mobilized by the individual in every situation (Bourdieu 2009: 119-121). So this is also a creative principle, because the individual tends to adapt to new situations through his/her resilience and capacity for reflexivity, besides using the specific context or perception of the situation, also mediated by other aspects – ideas, singularities, power relations, material things. The experience of self-representation thus involves a body process that is unconscious and automatic but also performative, creative, reflexive, discursive and culturally situated, within the practical (social) interactions in which the artists participate.

In terms of a social theory on the body, and in practical terms, this presupposes the entire perceptive experience of the body with all its performative aspects, internal insights, and external articulations, besides the spatial and temporal location of the individual – embodiment (cf. Csordas, 1994).

The body sees and is seen, hear and is heard, perceives and is perceived, but always out of "something", it being the visible and tangible presence of each other that provides the "thing": embodiment is the very basis of experience. The experience of the world comes from a human's sensitive and sensory capacities that are only possible through the body (as opposed to just an internalized one, from a mind/reason/cognitive viewpoint). In perceptive terms the body is a unity, it is the field of experience and not its subject, i.e., perception is not an internal representation of an external world; it is social interaction, it occurs in the world as the expression of individual social experience, and not just in the mind (Merleau-Ponty, 1972).



Embodiment is, thus, a methodological field defined by immediacy, presence and involvement in the situation and by the focus on the social practice. In this model, embodiment refers to the existential condition in which the self, performativity, practices and experiences are grounded. As discursive practice, however, the understanding of self-representation allows for reflection on the artist's relationship with further spaces and discourses, time, technology, and aesthetics.) It is a crucial element in the reconfiguration of their expression and identity, and the necessary condition for "being-in-the-world" (Csordas, 1994). This is seeing the "living body" as imperative, ranging from the idea that there is not a separate order of the body to the sense of the body being inherent to the interaction: the body is the living situation (Gendlin, 1992: 346).

Following Merleau-Ponty's rejection of the empiricist idea that limited perception to the response to stimuli, Gendlin (1992) argues that the meaning of the body is alive during situations, interacting not only through the five senses, but also through the immediacy with nature and through language (corporeal, verbal or other). That is because the body is not a mere observer or receiver of meanings, but a producer, throughout interaction. The body feels the whole situation and implicitly inflicts (senses and acts) the next action onto a living context. Individuals are themselves aware of the present, of the surrounding space which is inseparable from them (Gendlin, 1992: 342).

In short, from this perspective, embodiment refers to the physicality of the body through which we share attention (i.e., sensory involvement),<sup>4</sup> interest and mutual understanding of the same objects or situation (Tomasello et al., 2005). Social engagement with the work presupposes its "common understanding", given the sharing of perceptions (artists/viewers) and the human ability for mutual empathy, requiring not only "especially powerful forms of intentional reading and cultural learning, but also a unique motivation to share psychological states with others and unique forms of cognitive representation for doing so" (Tomasello et al., 2005: 675). This implies the practices and learning (including performativity, cognitive unconscious, human cognition, and reflexivity), the context and the way individuals produce the various performance styles. These are essential factors for understanding a world of embodied practices (Csordas, 1993: 115), a world defined by sensory experience and the modes of presence and social engagement, namely existing only

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<sup>4</sup> Called "somatic modes of attention" or the "multisensory processes through which we experience with our bodies a world inhabited by others" (Csordas, 1993:115).

as agency and bodily production: “shared subjectivity is possible because two people can recognize the same (...) project even if it is no longer there. Memory, sight, love. It must involve a full seeing of the other's absence, a seeing which also entails the acknowledgment of the other's presence. For to acknowledge the other's (always partial) presence is to acknowledge one's own (always partial) absence” (Phelan, 1993:149).

Perception gives us an immediate sense of the real, conveying the (enigmatic) feeling of the artist's body experience with the camera, namely “the sense of the situation” (Merleau-Ponty, 1972). As the body is more intuition than perception, it feels the situation; it is aware not only of the observable things, but of all the encompassing of being. Through our bodies and the empathic quality of being, we feel the experience of artists' bodies in the staged photograph, where: “the body is metonymic of self, of character, of voice, of presence ... but in the plenitude of its apparent visibility and availability, the [artist] actually disappears to become something else – movement, dance, sound, character (Phelan, 1993: 150). That “something else” becomes the “object of the spectator's gaze, in much the way the supplement given by each one's subjectivity functions to secure and displace the fixed meaning of the (floating) signifier [of the performative act]”. The artist's body is used to “pose a question about the inability to secure the relation between subjectivity and the body *per se*, to frame the lack of being promised by and through the body – that which cannot appear without a supplement” (*ibid.*:151). This means the sense of the scene or image is not just immediately given by the sense of perception, but is also mediated by it, acquiring new meanings in the scope of the shifting references existing in each spectator's *habitus*.

### **The Paradox of Immediacy (vs. mediation)**

While these works make use of obvious forms of mediation, such as photography; increasing sensorial intensification (Lepecky, 1998:15) also characterizes them, as they tend toward immediate techniques involving physical presence, direct communication and the senses (Bey, 1994:11). So, and as previously said, the understanding of the representation of the body in these works by Helena Almeida and Jorge Molder is not limited to the analysis of the mimetic reproduction of the body-image, it involves the analysis of the performative and expressive acts of the body in photography as dramatic conception – a conception based on actual bodily actions mobilised through reasoning and agency in the works –, presenting new

possibilities of interpreting the creative process, and the whole perceptive experience the scenic situation represents, namely from the perspective of the tangible and cultural engagement of artists' bodies in the scene:

From the body are born and propagate the meanings that underlie individual and collective existence, the body is the axis of the relationship with the world, the place and time in which the existence takes shape through the singular face of an actor, shaped by the social context and cultural environment in which the actor is inserted, the body is the semantic vector by which the evidence of the relationship with the world is built: perceptual activities, but also expression of feelings, ceremonial rites of interaction, set of gestures and mimics, production appearance, subtle game of seduction, body techniques, exercise, relation with the pain, and the suffering. First of all the existence is corporeal (Le Breton, 2006 [1992]: 7).

As we observe from the previous passage, through the body one has an immediate sense of the world through perception, but it is also the mediating axis of that same world. Hence, the paradox of immediacy when speaking about the body: besides translating an immediate, automatic, spontaneous and instinctive "sense of the situation", the body translates the socially constructed and culturally mediated condition of all human dispositions, actions and practices (Le Breton, 2006). The body of the artist in the photograph is an instrument to neutralize the polysemy of the image, its "excesses", and its "floating chain of signifiers" (Barthes, 2009); it is a body with a desire to know more, to increasingly question, feel, show and give more.

Reflecting on photography as the place of the performance, conceptual creation thus demands the deconstruction of the artists' gaze, references and beliefs, in order to reorganize the understanding of the works (whose results are also produced by technology, reflexivity, and visibility). It is also to prepare the observer's eye, which needs references to be able to organize and understand their own thought, as the photographic images from a performative act of the body can generate the aesthetic experience, but not the lived experience of the performance itself.

Photography's power to create environments was developed with greater intensity from the 60s onwards, with the avant-garde movements, and some events such as the sexual revolution that marked the passage of the body's condition and its actions to a wider imagery scenario. To acquire more visibility, the body stands out for the possibility of its

representation on large scales. This has changed the ways and means of presenting the body and its actions, as well as the theoretical predisposition of the photographic medium. In short, photography has become increasingly performative fetching references from the theatre, dance or cinema, as well as becoming “less and less painting”. In turn, with the advent of new media, contemporary performance now takes place in more extended scenes, acting in new spaces and thus adopting new levels of presence. Together with a number of technical and visual transformations, it has established a new relationship with photographic temporality, turning the tangible space of the performance into the epitomised space of the image, making them indistinguishable.

Beyond a living act of the body linking *habitus* and agency, knowledge and action, self-representation is a mediated discursive construction on the body. In either case, the body is the structuring medium of artists’ daily practices and, at the same time, their place of immediacy with the world, subject to the work’s immediacy space (see p. 1, footnote 2).

Hence, the analysis of the absence-presence relationship in Helena Almeida and Jorge Molder’s works represents a relational complex of multiple possibilities, where the presence of the body in the works is understood as performative representation, figuration, metonymy, abstraction or fiction, with its uses seen as a kind of double window of immediacy (vs. mediation).

Immediacy corresponds to the way the medium appears and hides, like a paradox inherent in the relationship underlying the medium’s existence and the connection between the elements requiring it. By definition, “immediacy” connects two entities or points, linking and denying the binary opposition or the space and time that may appear between them (Weisel, 2002). Classic dichotomies such as space/time, real/abstract, artist/medium, absence/presence, disappear before this concept.

From this perspective, the spectator vs. artist immediacy experience, involving the medium and its conception, which has changed over the last century in art history,<sup>5</sup> is important. While the medium is the way the artist alienates himself from his work; his “absence” is an absolute state in which the artist and his creation merge. This is particularly evident in self-representation. That is, while the medium may represent a boundary, this can also be overcome as the realistic representation of the artist appears as a “window” to the

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<sup>5</sup> For further examples of this paradox in art history, see Weisel (2002).

tangible experience of the scene. Here, the “transgressive function” that Foucault spoke of in the *Order of Speech* (1971), and on *What is an Author?* (1992) is evident, showing that just as the uniqueness of a work transcends the author’s person, the representation transcends the medium. However, the example shows another paradox: the mediate vs. the immediate sense of this experience. On the one hand, the spectator’s experience of the scene is given immediately by the eye; on the other, this experience is so real that the medium itself – photography – disappears, just to be the artist’s representation. Therefore, while the mediator is usually represented by the “window”, immediacy is the “absence of the window”, and it represents both the gaze and the experience of the observer: his real presence in front of the work, as the presence of the artist in front of the camera. Thus, the disappearance of the medium affects the observer as much as the artist, “a puzzle always reiterated in the so opaque metaphor of the window in any work: it shows up, showing what? It opens and closes on the subject who creates it, oscillating between presence and absence, as if it is him the landscape we seek, or the glass of the window that matters” (Conde, 2001: 30).

In fact, the paradox of immediacy (vs. mediation) is particularly well represented in photography. Polaroid, mechanical or digital cameras allowing work on elements of colour, brightness, form and space help (re)produce a mediated reality, although the image sensation is an immediate experience. Here the time factor is also decisive, as the medium disappears, in the absolute instant of the snapshot, isolating or fixing a moment. The photographic act operates a cut in time and space of the performative self-representation scene. Spatially, the photographic act fragments and isolates the action; temporally it immobilizes and retains it in the moment capturing the image. However, that moment does not operate a cut in time and space, rather it prolongs them into other spaces and times, to other experiences, and photography operates the mediation between them. Then mediation is an operative quality of the photographic mechanism, and immediacy is the sensory experience of the image in a given moment, both to the artists and the observers.

The primary and immediate (enigmatic) meeting with the image is potentially perverted by its re-cognition, since its decipherment is the beginning of disenchantment, of the recognizing of the potential and paradoxes of immediacy’s limits, with the observer inevitably inquiring when they observe and decode these pictures.

The paradox of immediacy is important in explaining this relationship between the artist, the medium and the viewer, as the works produce or induce specific and immediate

impressions from individuals (artists and viewers), relative to their media and the contexts surrounding them. This has led us to conceptualize the idea of immediacy spaces to classify the spaces of artists' agency, allowing the analysis of the relational, discursive and symbolic contexts of artistic practices including the context of knowledge/information and reception in which they are embedded, from the perspective of embodiment.

Therefore, the idea of "immediacy spaces" is used in reference to the notion of "mediations" in the art field, which "can be applied to all instruments, networks, and relations enabling or constraining any activity, agency, reflexivity, power, meaning or identity" (Conde, 2011:31). It aims above all, however, to enhance the embodied cultural conditions of artists' dispositions, actions and practices, by which they participate or are directly implicated in the social space. Immediacy spaces include the embodied production, disclosure, interaction, and acceptance conditions of the works and artists' public relations, allowing them to address the power, influence, and legitimation questions by way of circulating discourses, which are established or eventually contested by individuals, considering the specificities of the connections they produce.

So the works of Jorge Molder and Helena Almeida are immediate realities given by the performative experience of the artists' bodies, their body languages, in which the medium – photography – disappears only to be, in the end, the presence of a "body-object" that questions us in Helena Almeida, or a "character" who dazzles us in Jorge Molder. A body-object's presence overcoming the artist's person to become an abstract figure or just a "thing"; at other times more like a self-representation but, nonetheless, repeatedly like an enactment. Hence in the cases of Helena Almeida and Jorge Molder, the meaning of the works is related to the way the performativity of the body produces a certain ambiguity in the construction of the work's identity in the context of immediacy vs. mediation, presence vs. absence, self vs. representation.

### **Methodological Considerations**

To use embodiment as a methodological tool, does not mean that self-representation has the same configuration as bodily experience, but that embodied experience is the starting point for analyzing it. Our experiences, and how we make sense of them, depend on the bodies we have, and how we are and the ways we interact with others in the various spaces we inhabit.

It is through our bodies that we inhabit the world, and it is through our bodies that we are able to understand and act within it (cf. Csordas and Merleau-Ponty, *op. cit.*).

However, concerning the analysis of self-representation methodologically, it is important to acknowledge also “visuality” as a social construct. In the modern “scopic regime”, it “indicates a non-natural visual order operating at a pre-reflexive level to determining the dominant protocols of seeing and being under the public eye in a given society” (Martin Jay, 1988). Self-representation is thus interpreted as a mechanism with specific configurations visually reflecting the world, conferring an order of signs to it. Visuality present in this mode of representation refers both to the existence of techniques, technologies and media, and to precise languages founded on the construction modes of vision about self-representations and the body. In other words, to audio and visual media (drawing, photography, painting, and video) and images with their diverse modes of expression (pictorial, optical, performative and perceptive) (cf. Campos, 2010:118).

Thus, the analysis of self-representation as a performative act of the body entails not only a phenomenological and practical but a discursive perspective, translating the forms of construction of the relationship between embodiment and the narrative identity of the works. It follows a methodology centered on three main visual perspectives: the analysis of the proper visual discourse of the works, their message, and contents, concerning what is seen in the image (effects, composition, and meanings); the view of the creators concerning why, when, and how the image is seen; and the spectator’s perspective, for whom the primary contact and view of these works is aesthetic, but who only communicate with them in mediated contexts: as other texts, spaces and images (cf. Rose, 2007: 11-14).

This is a study of the meaning and interpretation of self-representation as a performative act of the body. However, it is also about the agency of the proper visual object, explored from multiple angles ranging from phenomenology and sociology to discourse analysis. In the three lines of inquiry the approach is qualitative, focusing on six fundamental aspects (Rose, 2007:6-12): i) the way self-representation reflects the artist’s social life and identity (as the effect of embodied practices); ii) the way images are looked at, and what they represent; iii) the way self-representation is embedded in a broader culture; iv) the way observers’ interpretations reinforce the meaning and effects of these images; v) the way self-representation is related to the question of interpretation and perception through the immediacy (vs. mediation) of the body in the world; vi) and the belief that (despite other

mediations), images have their own agency: “potentially [a mark] of resistance and recalcitrance (...) of the subversively strange or pleasant (...) something like the sensorial experience of the look” (Armstrong, 1996, Mitchell, 1996, van Eck & Winters, 2005 *apud* Rose 2007:21-22). Thus, image agency is not circumscribed by its meaning, the image produces effects that go beyond its meaning. It reflects also meanings created through other discourses, and working together with other types of social representations (e.g., food, gender, health, biology, politics, etc.). In short, images are multimodal, i.e., their meanings are built in conjunction with other objects, including written texts (e.g., catalogues, journals) and often other images. However, they are not reducible to the meanings of those objects (Rose, 2007:11).

To apply this methodology, this study included several observations on Helena Almeida’s *Voar* (2001), and Jorge Molder’s *Anatomy and Boxing* (1997) taken from the catalogues of the exhibitions.

Seen as the expressive manifestation of the singularity of the artist in a specific situation, the performativity of the body in the works translates the idea of a vivid scene in which the body is used not just as a subject or theme, but as an act of representation, calling attention to the presence of the real body. It is seen as the action and vehicle of artistic expression incorporating elements of the cinema, sculpture, drawing, art, and social life. It breaks conventions, forms and aesthetics, exceeding the physical limits of the performer/creator, and uniting all the instances of the image (objects, colours, movement, form, illumination, space and body-scape) captured in the epitome of the photographic moment built as performative universe:

In moving from the grammar of [photography] to the grammar of the body, one moves from the realm of metaphor to the realm of metonymy. For performance art itself however, the referent is always the agonizingly relevant body of the performer. Metaphor works to secure a vertical hierarchy of value and is reproductive; it works by erasing dissimilarity and negating difference; it turns two into one. Metonymy is additive and associative; it works to secure a horizontal axis of contiguity and displacement (Phelan, 1993: 150). The document of a performance then is only a spur to memory, an encouragement of memory to become present. The other arts, especially painting and photography, are drawn increasingly toward performance (*ibid.*: 147).

**Commented [API]:** Esta a frase que querias passar para nota de rodapé. Como não sei onde vão ser introduzidas as imagens deixei ficar assim. Mas podes, depois de escolher a localização das imagens, passar isto para nota se achares bem.



## Findings and Discussion

### **The *body inhabited by the work* – *Voar* (2001)**

Art for me is still full of mystery and all the questioning that before seemed great, now seems more naive. Currently, it is mainly about expressing my limitations with the greatest possible intensity (Helena Almeida, 2004).

Helena Almeida (b. 1934) studied painting in the Fine Arts School at the University of Lisbon. She is the daughter of the sculptor Leopoldo de Almeida and a major contemporary Portuguese artist. She started her career by participating in collective exhibitions in 1961; and in 1967 she had her first solo exhibition at Buchholz's Gallery in Lisbon (Pereira, 2013a).

She had a crucial role in creating almost a new genre in the undersized field of 1970s' Portuguese art, in which she transcended orthodox standards and disciplines, initiating new "processes of making art" and taking photography, drawing, painting and performativity practices to another level. Her exclusive artistic trajectory was markedly influenced by her embodied dispositions, namely the relationship with sculpture: a legacy of the days when she posed as a model for her father, already forming her connection to the arts and clearly influencing her choices with respect to the processes of how she makes, looks, and perhaps feels toward it (Pereira, 2013b: 399).

Evidently, these experiences shaped her work, and she became a model for herself, preparing postures and body-positions in scenes photographed later, entering in the expanded field of drawing and performance, since in her uses of the body she always expresses the will to explore her own physical limits and the limits of art (Pereira, 2013a: 417).

Inhabiting the space of the scene with her own body, at the same time as her body becomes inhabited by that same experience, Helena Almeida conveys "a sense of rupture and possible catastrophe that seems to float beyond the frame. This feeling gives her art a sense of fragility and violence. This potential break is expressed in discontinuities, in cuts and connections of the photographic series of multiple pieces. Action in her series is motivated by what happens in the invisible space between each of the images shown" (Phelan, 2005: 63). Her work has actually had this performative character since the beginning, which also reminds us of the human figure's classic academies where "to pose" meant "to act", and even when

she expresses the desire to become the work (evident in her first pieces, where she “dresses” the canvas, or is even suggested by the several titles named “Inhabited”). In fact, she has always felt the need to break away from painting (her formal academic training), mixing the different genres and techniques of the time (Pereira, 2013a:417).

Therefore the artistic context and visual regime of the times have also influenced her work, for instance with respect to performance practices arising in the 1960s, with direct connection to the arts of the body (body art), as well as photography practices. As she has said: “I think my main influences arise from the field of performance and installations”; [and] “I think it was also important to know the work of other artists of my time who became interested in photography. It was my time; I used a medium of my time” (Helena Almeida, 2000, *apud*, Mah, 2000:45-46). In an interview, Helena Almeida has also said that the artistic process is a way to “get away from herself” and that, in any case, she has already managed to escape “using her fingertips [she meant by her own bodily means]”. For her, art is a perpetual questioning concerning her person and the world, her experiences and the experiences of others.

*Voar* is a series of 4 pictures in blue tone from 2001. In this work, HA tries to fly, using a stool on which she lies in a horizontal position trying to escape with arms, hands, legs and feet raised in the air.

This is a work where the line between what appears as evidence on the photographic surface and what takes place out of the picture is particularly clear. Its four parts are a deceptively simple description of the will to fly, permeated by a blue light. According to Phelan, (2005), these four photographs also slightly evoke 9/11, 2001, and the grief caused by the attack on the twin towers in New York:

While these acts required a degree of technological sophistication, ideological, political and economic action, Helena Almeida required a bench, a camera, her husband look and their willingness to manipulate her own body. The simplicity of her methods hides the complexity of their aspirations and their achievement. It is like the figure wanted to run away, but there is no escape. However, the character does not fall in tragedy. Her attitude may be sadness, but also courageous, necessarily implying the courage to try to reach utopia, leave and persist in the desire to fly despite being on the ground. Reflects the obsession to leave, to “open new spaces” that runs through all the work of Helena Almeida. It also reflects a failure, defeat, and yet conveys a sense in which consciousness of reality and hope blend (Phelan, 2005: 63).

Through the possibility of the continuity of the body movements in the series, human consciousness escapes its own *habitus*, the structuring and structured principle of schemes of action and perception. It sets up new systems of comprehension, allowing the mechanisms of representation to operate on the elements mediating the absence-presence ambiguity imposed by the work, just as the tangible presence of the artist during the performative action with the stool is interlaced with her absence in the closing photograph. This abstract character of the work is also given by the way the artist hides her face, using her body like an object, forming outlines and shapes with her black clothes as if they were an inkblot.

In this series, each photograph (precisely selecting only a detail of the performative act of the body) reveals a particular aspect of the action/scene. Using the series' setup enables the continuity and direction of that action to be captured, showing both its performative and narrative sense, from the elevation of the body from the ground to its surprising flying performance, ending in its probable fall. The stool (used also in other works) is like a continuance of the artist's body, as is the floor and the space. The artist inhabits the space of the work, gearing up for the neutrality of the body-object through aspects such as the framework scale, the shape of the body displayed as a plane, and the black clothes. But she endlessly returns to herself, through the reality of her body experience in process.

The body is therefore also inhabited by the work through a strong conceptual component, interpreted in four pieces, referring also to a type of surrender to the public's gaze, framing the eternal human (impossible) desire – flying – in one ongoing continuity, between reality and possibility, between being and power, between experience and medium, between bodies.

The inhabited body of Helena Almeida in *Voar* is a performative creation, observed through the complexity and intensification of its performative specificity to the spectator's body. Out of improvisations generated from its liminal experience of perception with the immediacy space of the work, the spectator's body – the body of the other – becomes the work's "constitutional continuity" (Braz, 2007:39). As the artist in photography is often like a spectator of their own work, usually informing the different bodies they stage with additional information from an exterior look, so the spectator becomes a kind of performer, operating on the other side of the same continuum (Phelan, 1993), informing the work's meaning with an additional sensorial perspective.

The question of the body's immediacy and the medium is therefore present in this discussion. According to Braz (2007:38), "recurring to photography in this kind of pictorial and performative practice ensures a presence that overcomes the ephemeral. It works as a means of preserving the work's potentiality, avoiding its exhaustion when returning to photography's specificity". By "joining the pictorial with other elements that are not painting, [Helena Almeida] acquired a consciousness of the generic pictorial possibility in which it appears interdependent in a broader context of visual creation" (França, 1970 *apud* Braz, 2007:39).

In the work of Helena Almeida, photography's technical function historically constituted as a means of reproducing reality, becomes an aesthetic function of creation. As Soulages (2010) states, its concept moves from duplication to fiction. Understood as fiction, it transcends reality, becoming its dominant form of expression. In this work, everything that comes before the picture is deliberate; but the picture works as the continuance of an action by establishing a direct relationship with its referent, which ends up in the spectator's perceptive space.

In other words, photography creates a rupture in the time and space of the performative act of the body in *Voar* – spatially fragmenting and isolating a detail of the act (as the photographed space represents a selection); temporally immobilizing and holding the captured instant (as the photographed time represents a loss as its flux is interrupted). In the meantime, this rupture (fragments and losses) is overcome by the possibility of their extension and understanding in other spaces of immediacy (e.g., space of exhibition/observation, viewer's gaze), as immediacy translates the automatic, spontaneous and instinctive sense given by the scene by sharing intentionality with others (Merleau-Ponty, 1972 and Tomasello et. al, 2005).

This is why performance is not limited to its formal understanding in the work of Helena Almeida, but linked to the extended space of perception and photography. As well as photography not just being the medium used to communicate a message, it is part of the concept of the work along with the artist's body.

She has questioned the traditional ideas of painting, artwork and creator, bodily limits, the essence of photography, space and performance concepts, presenting them with new meanings. Starting with the overcoming of the traditional notion of painting that "is always corporeal" (Rodin, 1924 *apud* Merleau-Ponty, 2002:64), she also makes her atelier that "is as

much [her] body as a work material just like a pencil or the paint”, at the centre of her questioning: “the atelier exists as if it was my own body ... I hope that this body will contain all the painting. All the painting has to pass through my body ... the presence of the real body is essential, because, painting and drawing only exist when I exist as a body”. And as she has affirmed several times, she “represent[s] the work”, not herself, flying and mingling with the space, “being herself space and thus disabling the form” (Helena Almeida, 2000 *apud* Mah, 2000:47).

These are qualities that she adds to the immediate sense of being in the work, particular invoked in *Voar* through the open arms and the body posture trying to fly from the stool, a body trying to overcome its limits, and offering the possibility of the action’s continuity into another space. This is built up throughout the elements’ embodied interaction. In this sense, the body in the work is performative, alive, and not just a discursive creation.

Relative to the discursive discussion on visuality, this study has addressed the interpretation of the works relative to discourses which are intentionally produced by the artists and other agents in (other) mediation contexts, helping creating the works’ social recognition and identity as their disruptive senses, usually in four structuring ways: agential, practical, narrative, and expressive. In this respect, the works’ recognition and their respective legitimation processes seem grounded in such media discourses through four essential discursive mechanisms – singularity, procedural, ambiguity and legitimation. Legitimation is, on the one hand, based on “identification” (of the artist with the work) and “specification” (of their properties/composition); and, on the other hand, on “recognition” based on the display and acceptability of the works (validity).<sup>6</sup>

The artists and the works are recognized as the growing tension in the work’s narrative intensifies. Their originality lies in the creative tension generated by the compositional elements present in the visual narrative. From this connection, the continuous questioning

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<sup>6</sup> Legitimacy and recognition mechanisms involve a certain agential complexity and are generally abstract. For example, legitimacy can be nominalized and practised as a project of a material process (e.g. exhibiting the work); it can involve the agent, though in a contradictory way (“the artist photographing himself recreates his image as another”, etc.), or suppress it (“the figure of the double”); or it can be emphasized by a modulation (e.g. “the well-known artist”; “with a remarkable career”, etc.). And, it can result also from an immaterial non-verbal agential process particularly involving the viewer’s perception, and the symbol of the image constructed throughout the artist’s trajectory, accepted and often naturalized by the various discourses (for a further understanding of these question see, Pereira, 2013a:245-250).

arises, based on the variation of the themes, in the cultural system integrating works and artists, depending on how they are convened by them (Pereira, 2013a: 247-248).

### **Performing the *inevitable nature of the double* – *Anatomy and Boxing* (1997)**

The truth is that [the image] produces a strange effect, because I find someone that is, in a certain way, a double. I recognize him. I recognize certain features that I am sure belong to me, but at the same time I don't recognize myself in the images I make (Jorge Molder, 1998 apud Sardo 1998:177-178).

Jorge Molder (b. 1947) graduated in Philosophy from the University of Lisbon. He began his artistic career, in 1977, with his first individual exhibition, *Vilarinho das Furnas (Uma Encenação)*, *Paisagens com Água, Casas e um Trailer (Vilarinho das Furnas (A Staging))*, *Landscapes with Water, House and a Trailer*, at the Associação Portuguesa de Arte Fotográfica, in Lisbon. Professionally, he worked for the Justice Ministry (1976-1990), where he held several positions. In 1990, he began working as a consultant for the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation (1994-2000), after which he was executive director of the José de Azevedo Perdigão Modern Art Centre – CAMJAP, which he left for personal reasons in 2009. He had a fundamental importance in structuring visuality in the 1980s in Portugal, making his creative work just as critical of the world of photography and the arts. His unparalleled path, not exclusively artistic, has been quite remarkable as his questioning of identity has always been clear in his works (Pereira, 2013a: 400).

In his case, the process of recognition and identity construction is similar to Helena Almeida's, grounded on similar discursive legitimization processes and mechanisms. Nevertheless, the artist has a distinct path, namely related to aspects of embodiment, culture, and reflexive identity: following a path that has not been solely artistic, a degree in Philosophy and being half Hungarian and half Portuguese, he transposes in a non-linear way those influences to his works, a fact that gives them a unique character: "I can say, for example, that it is not by chance that the 1990 series is called *The Portuguese Dutchman*. I am indeed half Portuguese and half Hungarian, with a Dutch surname; the title refers directly to events in my past or present life" (Molder, 1997a: n. p., § 2). Actually, he is evidencing the embodied character of the proper experience (of the work): "either by inclusion or expulsion, everything

we do always marks everything that is happening in our lives” (Molder, 2009, *apud*, Vieira, 2009: 15).

This process of influence can be called, as in Helena Almeida’s case, a process of *habitus* transference. In his work, the body is explored by way of questioning the relationship between the self and the other, the self-portrait and self-representation, as Molder plays with the endless variety of images of himself, which always end up being the images of each other without ever ceasing to represent him. In this game, he also plays with the paradox of life and identity: the representation is him but always mediated by others, as the picture reveals (Oliveira, 2009 *apud* Pereira, 2013a: 418). Daily experiences, inspirations, dreams, but also his pragmatic reflection are usually transposed to the works.

Self-representation returns the body to the prime experience of the mirror. Namely, to “the presence of the other as me”, and “of me as the other”, fixing an absence and a presence. At the same time, the mirror mediation prevents the subject from achieving the real. In this “game of mirrors”, the reality is a flicker, a black box, a switch of desire made to scrutinize, to see more, to increase knowledge, and expand the self through the other, which the image reflects like a set of appearances or a continuous specular presence (Jorge, 2008).

The series *Anatomy and Boxing* was first shown in Oporto (1997), inaugurating the building of the Portuguese Centre of Photography. It was subsequently exhibited in England. On this process of exhibiting, Molder has commented: “I have exhibited many times using different images from series, and I have shuffled them around in different ways. This does not mean that I wanted to produce a different story each time. It merely means the images work on their own, they trigger a fictional direction which in fact has no precedent” (Jorge Molder, 1997a, n. p. § 8 *apud* Hunt 1999: 23).

*Anatomy and Boxing* also exists as a book, in which the square format of the works (each print 102 x 102cm) is perhaps less evident than when exhibited. As Ian Hunt (1999:23) puts it, the square is a fundamental part of the impression of the series (as in most of Molder’s works), because the pictures place the head and figure in many different directions within the frame. When hung in particular groupings, it can seem that the square containing the head has been tumbled like a dice. The graphic and abstract impact of the works is outstanding. And, most importantly, on the point of performative action, photographic research and conception is fundamentally aesthetic.

Although necessary to frame aspects of his view, Jorge Molder is aware that there is an apparent irony in the use of his own body in the work, but this is an essential strategy to critique the ontological assumptions inherent within the conceptions of photography and performance and, particularly, that have characterised self-representation since the Renaissance. This artist takes the position that there is nothing essentially given about self-representation consciousness. Rather, the characterizations of self-representation that he outlines carry (usually implicit) ontological assumptions that may be inappropriate and/or limit the understanding of his practice. The depiction of the body that he proposes is based instead on an alternative ontology. While this cannot be empirically verified (no ontology can), he suggests it has a way of extending and assessing usual conceptions of performative practices and photography. The book does, however, add a "brief glossary" in which the dictionary definitions of certain words are given: fight, ring, theatre, sleep, dissect, shine, agony, appropriate, unspeakable, inert, stroke, ice, anatomy, defeat, glory, illusion, forgetful, glossary, brief. "The book is unpaginated, [showing] that it is an artist's production, not a work of reference, and the pictures are not separately titled or numbered." (Hunt, 1999:23).

For Jorge Molder, the works investigate two arenas of representation: the anatomy theatre (in a medical school) and the boxing ring. These are two places where the body is completely misshaped or exhaustively analysed. The impact of the works, though hard to measure and describe, support Molder's observation that he is attempting "to manoeuvre between an excess of realism and the lack of it" (Jorge Molder, 1997a: n. p. § 12). "How else could the coexistence of such images ... gain such an ability to intrigue?" (Hunt, 1999:24).

Nevertheless, the brief glossary does not solely concern itself with words from the arenas of boxing and anatomy. Some inclusions, such as "sleep", "forgetful" or "inert", are quite unexpected, asking us to look at the images outside the set of associations with boxing, and anatomy we have been encouraged to employ, just as the stillness of the body in the image, is reminiscent of the stillness of the body when it sleeps:

"Sleep", adds another layer of possibility. The many images of Molder lying down, some showing him on a specially upholstered dark support, could be representations of this suit-and-tie wearing boxers pursuit of rest "after" or "before" the fight. Many show him with eyes open, as though coming round from a blow or perhaps just restless, insomniac, waiting for the gift of sleep. There are more than a few visual hints of movie vampire, sleeping the sleep of the undead (Molder's swept-back hair and



expression, the lighting and the occasional aura caused by the blurring of the image through movement) (Hunt, 1999:24).

Similarly “forgetful”, indicating lapses of memory and attention, recalling the cognitive capacity to observe and assimilate and to let go, is a curious inclusion, as it seems to point to the depictions of the suited figure apparently knocked out cold. This is a game of opposites and as commonly occurs in Molder’s style, the images do provoke that capacity to overcome the obvious.

In Ian Hunt’s view (1999: 24-25), in *Anatomy and Boxing*, Molder resembles an arch-criminal appearing to have something to hide. He remembers Degas’ comparison of the perpetration of a work of art to that of a perfect crime, as “criminals are nearly always to be found in the vicinity of professional boxers”. But again, such illusions are not defined by the glossary, providing no reassurance or confirmation. Nonetheless, as “it is an orthodoxy too often hastened over that art is completed by the viewer’s interpretation, that works of art cannot determine their own reception, the glossary is authorial and it suggests a limit to the spectra of endless uncertainty”, making it possible “to create a partial reconstruction of the artist’s intention”, as *Anatomy and Boxing* is “a fluctuation of meaning and tone” (*ibid.*). The engagement with the work covers both expressive and compositional aspects. It reveals and, at the same time, instigates us to relate categories usually not so obviously connected – to scrutinize (anatomy) and to fight (boxing), curiously both body related –, showing at the same time a way to do it, exactly through the glossary.

Another inclusion in the glossary is “appropriate” meaning “to take and use as one’s own; to devote (money etc.) to a special purpose”. In Ian Hunt’s view, this may refer to the way that a work of art makes itself available for a viewer who appropriates its meaning, stating that the

possibility of violence in any act of interpretation is comically emphasized by the reminder that appropriation has as its strong, non-art meaning bureaucratic theft, the casual way in which (if you’re the right kind of criminal) money can be quietly moved from one place to another, leaving a money shaped hole. In this sense, perhaps Molder is wryly suggesting that casual acts of interpretation in art galleries are not crimes without a victim (*ibid.*).

Nonetheless, “appropriate” can also be interpreted as the way viewers embody the work through immediacy. As the way the presence of the work generates one perceptive experience that according to Barthes (1980) is possible through the *punctum*, and from our perspective is called agency. The agency of the image enables relations with visuality practices and further spaces (e.g. ways of disclosing and reproducing the works, and recognition contexts). Beyond the communication with the reception of the works, the appropriation of a particular view of the object is like the scene’s ambiguous suspension that is entering the viewer’s body delimitation.

Reflecting a deliberate sense of obliteration, the inevitable nature of the double – the opposition between character and artist – looks for his presence that sometimes hides, sometimes appears, combining states of secrecy and revelation, and constructing a kind of obsessive abstract scene: “When I see an image that does not coincide with myself and I don’t recognize anyone in particular in it, still I am able to recognize that that is someone that isn’t anyone in particular. I think that is an amazing experience and I would say that those images are abstractions” (Jorge Molder, 1998 apud Sardo, 1998:178).

Ambiguously neutral, the narrative character of the work establishes the urgency of a body and its performance where the illuminated face, points to the silence of sleep, or to that absolute suspension of the anticipation of the fall, transforming the work in a fusion of icon and index in dialogue with the ideas of anatomy and boxing.

The presence of “anatomy” in his overall title might be a reminder that for any viewer to anatomize a work if is necessary to imagine it as already dead or unconscious of our approach, is what many of the works actually depict. Precisely the possibility that a still image of the artist feigning unconsciousness or sleep could surprise us and rear up, alive. And that this possibility could at the same time make us laugh, an ability of this series that is not be forgotten. It is just this flexibility of tone that distances the works from what might at first sight appear to be historical antecedents, such as the possibility of being in front of photographic self-portraits (Hunt, 1999: 25).

Relative to this discussion and the way images affect the physical body, Molder explains how the presence of the image generates an involvement, i.e., how each image can initiate a different but equally intense reaction:

When I approach an image of small dimensions or deviate the better to see an image of large dimensions, I react actively to their presence. In the first case, my look searches; in the second, my look finds. While experiencing the large photograph, its presence also affects me physically; in the case of the small image, it is the look that commands. In both situations, the work is a presence (Molder, 1998 apud Sardo: 190-191).

Centered on the interplay between performance and photography, *Anatomy and Boxing* shows how the liminality of the body can be a determining factor in the reconfiguration of the understanding of contamination and contiguity in the arts. Through the reflection on the body seen as space of performativity and identity, the series is an unfathomable sounding of the art and its limits, exploring the dimension of its proper singularity as well as the potential for embodiment.

Furthermore, a consciousness of time (and movement) underlying living actions and common to the works of Jorge Molder enters this series. Time that sometimes is behind us, sometimes ahead, the time of the falling, the reified time objectified and suspended in photography and the possibility of its transcendence in the continuity of imagination and memory. Time present in the movements of the body, of the hands protecting the face, in the movements of the ropes of the ring when the weight of the body touches them, the time fixed in the line dividing the two faces, which may be a time fragment or the unstoppable timeline crisscrossed with the awareness of the space and the body – the mirror line, the mirror projecting the other, remembering the absence of the artist while returning back his image – similar to a movement of dis-embodiment followed by a movement of re-embodiment, like when one becomes aware of existence itself, of finally being present as the image appearance intensifies.

## Conclusion

The reflection on the body as performative practice in photography has shown that the categories of space and time are especially important as the expression, body manipulation and the sequence of movements are central to the maintenance of artists' roles in the specific scenarios of action of *Voar* and *Anatomy and Boxing*, mediating the construction of their personal and social identity and significant to the agency of the works in extended spaces of perception.

More associated with time and movement (Jorge Molder), or with space and form (Helena Almeida), they both refer to the way the body turns into an instrument of representation through the immediacy artist-body-medium, and the three-way relationship: body-experience-process. Still there are scenes with the abstract image of the “double”, the “flying body”, the “boxer” or just the “other”. “They are almost abstract presences, where the use/presence of the artist’s own body is the mark of the abstraction” (Sardo, 2005:14).

The identity of the works is then very much associated with the fusion between the mediating elements configuring the self-representation performative act, and their abstract immediate self-referential character offered by the medium of photography. While the presence of the artist and the viewer is identified with the living body, their absence is connected with the dimension of the generic work possibility, and grounded in what the body is in potentiality.

Concluding, in these cases the body is a resource that is being used to construct a particular version of the work’s identity and of the relationship between the two media: performance (body) and photography (representation), allowing the discussion of the disruptions and aporias of the absence-presence relation in both series. As visual information in the pictures provided elements for this understanding, they can, moreover, be understood through the agency of self-representation. The role of their creators is also confirmed through the agency of the “autonomous artwork”, since it is the artists’ role to give the status of artwork to their pieces: “in theory the artwork can always be absent as a possibility, through the narrative given by the artists. However, the presence of the artists reinforces the absent artwork in the same way that the presence of the artwork reinforces the absent artist (Maio, 2011:51). Thus, the meaning of self-representation is not completely denoted by their creators. The image hides potential senses that are activated by the presence of the viewer in front of each image. And, if generically, photography contains a greater degree of denotation (Barthes, 1998), the truth is that in the works of Jorge Molder and Helena Almeida, particularly, the use of the body is not completely arbitrary or unplanned.

However, the negation of the pure presence is the conceivable ideal to understand the relationship between artists, medium (containing the continuity of time and movement) and viewers. The rejection of such a fixed centre (presence or medium) takes the action in the scene to a game of meanings in which the representation subverts the instituted order. The “absence-presence” of the artists’ bodies in the works joins the presence of the body-

object to the absence of the subject through diverse mechanisms like the neutrality of the black clothes, formlessness and facial suppression in Helena Almeida's case; and the use of the double, the mirror metaphor and the playing of characters in Jorge Molder's case.

The use of the body itself in Jorge Molder and Helena Almeida's photographs constitutes the imprint of one abstraction. Limitations of the individual presence are transcended by the body performances' extension in time and space through photography, immediacy, and the agency of the works. The series and repeated elements translate an "image-movement", an echo of the plastic material made of discontinuities vs. continuities, a group of unpredictable sensations that give a certain ambiguity and disrupting character to the works and to their narrative sense, leaving their meanings in suspension.

In the cases of Helena Almeida and Jorge Molder, the image is where the absence-presence binary opposition is eliminated to give place to the appearance of an intermediary field of perception: an interchange and fusion between these two terms, as Derrida (1978) affirms in the scope of the idea of difference, "a field continuously in process". The art of Jorge Molder and Helena Almeida is this field continuously in process. It rejects the fixity of the image and the division of the elements, immediately connecting artist, medium and viewer, selecting instead their hesitations and uncertainties.

Their works add windows of understanding to the field of body performative practices and photography. Therefore, the final assumption is that we should primarily understand performance and photography in terms of practices that are not out of sync or incompatible. We should, in fact, to look to self-representation as embodied experience, as the result of *habitus* and bodily expressive manifestations (the two dimensions of embodiment) happening in specific sites. If we succeed in doing so, we will gain a model for understanding self-representation in photography as a performative practice/act of the body. A phenomenological and sociological interpretive approach of self-representation that shows that both the production and reception of the works are embodied.

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